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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the evolution of a Professional Development School (PDS) governance model that began with a one-school partnership and moved to a multiple site partnership network. The governance model is based on a union formed between a private university and a local school district. It emphasizes shared decision making and collaborative planning, and it encourages school faculty to assume leadership roles. Its four goals are to increase student achievement, implement research-based best practices in teaching, provide ongoing support for preservice and inservice activities to enhance professionalism, and develop strong professional development partnerships. The partnership began with a Title I elementary school and used on-site governance. A steering council ensured that the partnership accomplished goals established by participants. The council included teacher educators, school teachers and administrators, district personnel, and a university/school liaison. The partnership expanded after 3 years to include three more schools, and the governance structure was modified to use a multi-site governance model. Seven recommendations for institutions developing similar frameworks include: build an environment of trust among steering council members by starting with nonthreatening activities; include representatives from all stakeholder groups; and schedule regular meetings with written agendas. (SM)

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# A PDS Governance Model: Building Collaboration and Accountability

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**A PDS Governance Model: Building Collaboration and Accountability**

Many universities and school districts have joined together to participate in K-12 education reform through the establishment of Professional Development School partnerships (PDS). Professional development schools are committed to developing exemplary practices to maximize student outcomes, provide optimum sites for teacher preparation, offer research-based teacher professional development, and implement reflective inquiry to enhance learning for all (Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris, & Black, 1995). In addition to these purposes, PDSs serve as vehicles for simultaneous renewal of schooling and teacher preparation (Goodlad, 1994). In order to accomplish this educational agenda, PDSs need ongoing opportunities to examine partnership goals and purpose (Teitel, 1998). The importance of this point is clear when one considers that as separate and complex institutions, schools and universities have distinct missions, cultures, and relationships that are not always mutual and may result in barriers to partnership development as institutional self-interests operate at cross purposes. Thus, overcoming the barriers to establishing and maintaining effective school and university partnerships requires early and ongoing preparation and planning (Moore, Hopkins, & Tullis, 1991). A strong governing body representing all participants is vital to the success of a PDS. In this article, we describe the evolution of a PDS governance model that began with a one-school partnership and moved to a multiple site partnership network. Further, we offer recommendations for other institutions establishing PDS governance frameworks.

The governance models described in this article are based on a union formed between a private university in the southeast and a local school district. This professional development partnership emphasizes shared decision making, collaborative planning, and encourages school faculty to assume leadership roles. The work of the PDS partnership

is guided by the following four goals: (1) increase student achievement; (2) implement research-based best practices in teaching (3) provide on-going support for preservice and inservice activities to enhance professionalism; and (4) develop strong professional development partnerships. Further, the vision statement developed by the PDS partnership best summarizes the focus of this collaboration:

> The collaborative professional development partnership is dedicated to supporting a diverse community of learners at all levels of educational development. Through mutual trust, respect, and shared decision making, emphasis [is] placed on professional growth, effective instructional practices and mentoring.

**A One-Site Governance Model**

The PDS partnership began with a Title 1 elementary school of approximately 800 students prekindergarten through grade five after a systematic and deliberate selection process (Heins & Tichenor, 1999). Ensuring that the partnership accomplishes the goals established by the participants is a key function of the governance body referred to as the PDS steering council. The steering council, consisting of teacher education faculty, teachers and administrators from the elementary school, district personnel, and the university/school liaison, was formed during the planning stages of the partnership. The primary function of this group is to oversee PDS partnership activities. To carry out this charge, the steering council meets monthly throughout the school year to establish policies for the partnership, coordinate and manage PDS activities, and engage in long term planning and assessment. The steering council plans spring/summer retreats, which are opportunities for members to reflect on and celebrate the year's accomplishments, formulate priorities for the upcoming year, and establish a time line for new PDS initiatives. Further, as a formal kick-off to the partnership each year, the steering council

plans a motivational activity and discussion time to present PDS opportunities to school personnel. PDS adaptations of "Jeopardy" and "Mission Impossible", and a video presentation highlighting the recently formed PDS Network are examples of PDS kick-off events.

To facilitate shared decision-making, a university faculty member and a school faculty member are designated as co-chairs of the council. However, in the first year of the partnership, PDS governance was predominantly university driven as teacher education faculty assumed most of the responsibility for planning and conducting meetings and facilitating PDS activities. The following year saw greater collaboration regarding the planning and facilitation phases of governance with school and university faculty working together on PDS sponsored initiatives. The joint planning and facilitation of the second annual summer retreat by the council co-chairs and a year long study group on best practices in education co-facilitated by a teacher and a university faculty member are two examples of the collaboration that has occurred during the second year as a partnership. During the partnership's third year and fourth year, leadership for governance and PDS activities has been predominantly school driven with university faculty providing support as needed.

The selection of steering council members is crucial. An important dimension of the council is an agreement involving equitable representation of key personnel in the governance structure (Holmes Group, 1990, Levine, 1996, Mehaffy, 1992). Early in the formation of the PDS, a written partnership agreement outlining specific duties and responsibilities of university, elementary school, and school district participants was drafted. One condition outlined in this agreement included a commitment by the school, school district, and university to actively

participate in the PDS steering council. Since its formation, the one-site steering council has maintained a stable membership with representatives from all areas. At the school level participants are selected so that there remains an equitable representation across administration, grade levels and special areas. Although steering council members are committed to serving for at least one academic year, they can participate for longer.

Prior to steering council meetings, all members are asked to submit agenda items. Minutes are taken of all meetings, distributed to members shortly after the meeting, and shared with school personnel through bulletin board postings. Meetings are consistently scheduled for the last Thursday of each month. Typical topics of discussion at the meetings include a report from the PDS liaison, grant summaries, program evaluation, teacher professional development activities, teacher candidate activities, and special PDS sponsored events such as conference attendance, presentations, or staff development opportunities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Steering Council Agenda

PDS Steering Council Meeting
Agenda

1. Greetings
2. PDS Network
3. Application time line for PDS Award (due next January)
4. Liaison report
   - PDS activities
   - Newsletter stories
   - Stetson sport tickets for honor roll students
   - Intern update
5. Conferences
   - Learn and Serve Regional Institute
   - Association of Teacher Educators Annual Meeting
6. PTA night in March
7. Literature conference
   - Student essays
8. End of year survey
9. Summer planning/retreat
10. Other/next meeting date

Two helpful ways in which PDS activities are documented are through a tracking chart and a time line. Organized by month, the time line provides a listing of PDS activities followed by the date. The tracking chart is a more detailed version of the time line with and the specific activities listed followed by location, participant involvement, date started and completed, evaluation, and relationship to partnership goals.

An important aspect of beginning any PDS partnership is the signing of a agreement between the district, school, and university. Our formal agreement was written early in the collaboration and committed each institution to the partnership for a period of three years. In the agreement, we included the rationale, duration of partnership, vision statement, partnership goals, and specific roles and responsibilities of all participants. The agreement was signed by the district superintendent, school board chairman, school principal, university president, college dean, and the chair of the education department.

**A Multi-Site Governance Model**

The governance system described above has been very effective in the oversight of the one school PDS site. However, after three years of partnering with one elementary school, the PDS partnership was expanded to include three additional elementary schools, thus beginning a Professional Development School Network. With additional schools joining the PDS partnership, modifications to the governance structure were needed.

The purpose of the PDS network is to increase collaboration and support among area elementary schools and the university by providing opportunities for participants to work with other network schools in the area of professional development. Under this new direction, the

original PDS site serves as the training center or hub site to disseminate best practices to expanded sites as well as mentor fellow teachers. As before, we began this relationship with a formal signed agreement between the district, participating schools, and university.

Again, the essential mechanism for ensuring that the PDS remains accountable to all participating educational organizations and accomplishes the established goals is the governance structure. Building on the experience and success of the original PDS steering council, the PDS network governance structure has been designed to address the unique interests and needs of the four schools, school district, and university involved in the educational partnership. Thus, a two-tier system was established. The overarching tier is a network steering council with at least three representatives from all the schools (two teachers and the school principal), university faculty members, and district personnel. This council meets twice per semester to oversee all PDS network activities. Here again, co-chairs have been identified to lead the council. However, as this is a new endeavor for us, the co-chairs for the first year are both university faculty members. As with the original steering council, we continue with the distribution of minutes after each meeting and the upkeep of a network tracking chart.

In addition to the network steering council, each participating school has a site-level steering council, which functions much like the original steering council. To ensure university representation, at least one university faculty member serves on each site-level steering council. It is interesting to note, that at several schools, the steering council exists as a separate group whereas in other schools the steering council has been assimilated into an extant group (i.e., school-wide leadership committee).

Although, the PDS network adopted the original partnership goals that channel the collective work of the network, one of the first tasks assigned by the network council was for

each school-based council to address its areas of need (see chart 1). As noted in chart 1, a focus area common across all network schools emerged. This common focus allows the network partners to plan and coordinate common educational activities for all stakeholders. (During the initial network steering council meeting, a decision was made and agreed upon unanimously that network sponsored activities which are scheduled at one school would be open to faculty from other network schools.)

Chart 1: School Based Focus Areas

| Elementary 1 | Elementary 2 |
|---|---|
| • Closing the gap for Student Achievement<br>• Responding to behavior issues<br>• Increasing reading skills and literacy<br>• Serving special needs children<br>• Incorporating technology<br>• Building a team-oriented faculty<br>• Providing educational outdoor activities | • Closing the gap for student Achievement<br>• Improving instruction in reading and literacy<br>• Utilizing multiple alternative Assessments<br>• Networking with other schools to share best practices |
| **Elementary 3** | **Elementary 4** |
| • Closing the gap for student achievement<br>• Providing technology instruction for children<br>• Developing small group instruction for at-risk students in reading and math<br>• Offering early literacy intervention<br>• Planning hands-on strategies in science and math | • Closing the gap for student achievement<br>• Enriching science with hands-on activities<br>• Improving performance of the lowest performing students, especially in reading<br>• Developing professional activities for teachers<br>• Drawing on community resources to support students and families |

Some topics already addressed by the network steering council include budgetary issues, school level governance, workshops, technology integration, program evaluation, and teacher candidate preparation. A particularly successful event has been the distribution of mini-grants to

teachers at all schools. (Mini-grants were funded through university monies.) In order to receive these mini-grants, teachers had to submit an application that supported one or more of the identified focus areas at each school. Principals from each school were asked to rank their teachers' proposals in relation to how well they addressed the focus areas. A selection committee comprised of representatives from the university and each school then reviewed these proposals. In order to ensure fairness teachers' names were removed from the mini-grant proposals prior to being brought before the selection committee. This is an example of how all schools in the partnership network participated in the process of allocating resources in order to support partnership goals.

A critical first year challenge for the network council has been keeping communication lines open among all schools and participants. It has been difficult to keep all stakeholders apprised of all activities. Some of the structures in place to maintain open communication include university faculty on-site at each school also serve on the school's PDS governing body, an interschool mailing system, principal and faculty representatives from each school participating in the network steering council, and a PDS network electronic listserv. A second challenge involves the equitable distribution of both financial and human resources among the network schools. This ongoing challenge is how to address the needs and wants of schools within the context of a small university and education department. With a teacher education faculty numbering ten and a small student body, we continue to struggle with finding ways to work smarter not harder. One example has been to encourage preservice teachers who are involved in research projects to consider undertaking a study that would support a partnership school's focus area.

**Recommendations**

Though diverse in structure and operation, educational partnerships are engaged in the work of increasing student achievement, mentoring preserves teachers, while providing on-going professional development activities for inservice teachers. A strong governance model for any partnership builds a framework that supports mutual educational goals and creates opportunities in which all participants are able to grow professionally. After four years of defining and redesigning our governance structure, we have learned many important lessons. We offer the following recommendations for institutions developing similar frameworks:

1. Build an environment of trust among steering council members by starting with non-threatening activities. Beginning of the year events such as Kick-Offs and periodic socials along with activities originating at the school level that address specific student learning and teacher professional needs have proven to be stable bedrock upon which to build a strong and enduring foundation of trust. This is especially important when adding new PDS partners and establishing new steering councils.

2. Include representatives from all stakeholder groups. An inclusive policy regarding governance communicates to individuals and groups that their participation is valued and necessary in order to accomplish the goals set forth to bring about educational reform. Although many individuals may volunteer initially, most groups experience attrition such that a strong working core of professionals remains. Establishing co-chairs for the council and providing opportunities for all participants to provide input for agenda items are indicators of an inclusive governance body.

3. Schedule regular meetings with written agendas. Formalizing the work of the PDS through a governing body such as a steering council is essential in order to coordinate day to day activities between partnership schools and the university and to maintain a balance between the goals of the partnership and the specific focus areas of each individual school.

4. Distribute steering council minutes to all stakeholders. People like to be informed. It sends the message that they are important to the success of the partnership. Moreover, organizations that work in partnerships are more likely to realize their mutual self-interests when communication flows openly between organizations. Council minutes are an excellent form of communicating, in an abbreviated form, the work of the PDS partnership at the school, university, and district level.

5. Outline short-term as well as long-term plans. Maintaining the day-to-day work of the PDS is an important function of a governance body. Equally important in governance is the ability to focus the lens of day-to-day work in order to clearly view and monitor the movement of the partnership toward the accomplishment of long term plans. Providing times during the year to reflect on what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done is essential in order adequately address both short-term and long-term planning.

6. Rotate steering council membership periodically. Governance is time-consuming work and people are more likely to volunteer and serve with genuine commitment if they know the duration of time involved. Members should also be free to resign if they find the responsibilities or time requirements too demanding. A staggered rotational membership fosters innovation, provides continuity and maintenance, and minimizes the likelihood of organizational stagnation. Foremost, steering council members must be committed to the mission and goals of the partnership.

7. Develop a formal written partnership agreement early in the relationship, which is consented to and signed by the key stakeholders. Formalizing the partnership through a written and signed agreement serves to center the partnership and increase commitment among participants.

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